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UNCLAS ABUJA 002260

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: REQUEST FOR HELICOPTER AUTHORIZATION

REF: ABUJA 2259

1. NIACT IMMEDIATE precedence required because of urgent humanitarian crisis. Precedence authorized by CDA Andrews.

2. This is an urgent action request for the Department. Please see para 5. Response requested by OOB Abuja (0630 GMT) on Monday, 10 September.

3. Embassy requests State Department authorization to allocate Operation Focus Relief helicopter operational time to reconnaissance of flood-stricken areas in Kano and Jigawa States for humanitarian assistance missions. U.S. Mission has, through the CDA and after consultation with the Ambassador, declared an emergency in Kano and Jigawa States due to significant flooding (Ref A). Use of OFR helicopter assets will facilitate assessment of the disaster and enable the most effective possible response.

4. DATT COMMENT: Two Operation FOCUS RELIEF-dedicated DOS-contracted Mi-8 MTB helicopters, operated by International Charter Incorporated, are currently stationed in Abuja. A third helicopter arrives on 15 September. Use of these helicopters to assess the flood-stricken areas and evaluate potential U.S. (and Nigerian) response represents an unparalleled ability to find answers quickly and to demonstrate USG concern very visibly. Short-term impact on Operation Focus Relief is extremely minimal: Phase III elements begin arriving this week, however, training does not begin in Birnin-Kebbi until 24 September. Use of these helicopters would mean postponing the placement of one helicopter in Birnin-Kebbi by only a few days until U.S. mission response scenarios have been decided upon. END DATT COMMENT.

5. ACTION REQUEST: Embassy requests immediate Department authorization to allocate Operation Focus Relief helicopter operational time to aerial reconnaissance missions, if needed. END ACTION REQUEST.  
Andrews